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SUBJECT: Syria/Iraq, Syria/Iran, Middle East Peace Conference, Non-Allied States Ministerial, Syria/US, Lebanon (9/4-5)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on September 4 reported that President Asad chaired a meeting the Central Leadership of National Progressive Front. During the meeting, President Asad briefed the Front's members on the latest political developments in the region. He referred to the role played by "some superpowers to instigate conflicts instead of finding serious solutions to them as a result of lacking objective vision of the real situation in the region and prospects of solution to it in a way that realizes development and preserves stability." President Asad pointed out to efforts exerted by Syria in all different circumstances to contain disorder and frustration fed by "powers hostile to the Arab nation."

Papers on September 5 reported FM Mouallem's participation in the Arab League Ministerial meeting held in Cairo on September 4 in preparation for the upcoming peace conference organized by the US in the fall. Papers featured two press statements by Egyptian FM Abul-Ghait in Cairo, and another statement by Austrian Chancellor Gusenbauer in Vienna reiterating the importance of involving Syrian in any effort to revive Middle East peace. All papers reported that FM Shara will be visiting Rome on September 5 and will meet with FM Prodi and Lamberto Dini, Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee at the Italian Senate. He will also convey a message from President Asad to the Pope Benedict XVI. Apparently Italy is mediating to involve Syria in the upcoming peace conference in the fall.

On Syria-Iranian relation, papers on September 4 reported that Iranian President Ahmedinejad's meeting with FM Mouallem on September 3 who conveyed a message from President Asad on bilateral relations and latest regional developments. Earlier, Minister Mouallem chaired Syria's delegation to the Ministerial meeting of Non-Aligned Countries opened in Tehran on September 3.

As for developments in Lebanon, papers on September 5 reported a press conference in Beirut on September 4 by General Shawqi al-Masri, Lebanese Chief of Staff and George Khouri, Head of Lebanese Army Intelligence, denying any connection between Fateh al-Islam group and Syria or Syrian intelligence, saying that Fateh al-Islam is entirely connected with al-Qaeda organization.

On Iraq, papers on September 4 reported President Bush's sudden visit to Iraq on September 3 and his meetings with Iraqi officials

and American military commanders. Papers noted that the US president, accompanied by senior administration officials, arrived in the American military base in Al-Anbar "in complete secrecy" while the British forces were withdrawing from the southern Iraqi city of Basra.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad presides over a meeting by the National Progressive Front and briefs on latest political developments in the region: Some superpowers instigate conflicts in the region and Syria strives to contain factors of disorder and frustration" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/4)

"US Senator Dennis Kucinich: Syria has presented a lifeline for millions of Iraqis. The UN calls for supporting Syria. The UN calls for supporting Syria's efforts in hosting Iraqi refugees" (Independent al-Watan, 9/4)

"President Asad sends a message to Pope Benedict XVI. VP Shara visits Rome today to meet the Pope and Italian FM Prodi" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/5)

"Foreign Minister Mouallem participates in the Arab League Ministerial in Cairo. Egyptian FM Abul-Ghait reiterates the importance of involving Syria in any effort to revive Middle East peace" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/5)

"Iranian President Ahmedinejad receives a message from President Asad convoyed by Foreign FM Mouallem" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/4)

"Ahmedinejad: We have proof that no country will dare launch attack against Iran" (Independent al-Watan, 9/4)

"Deputy Foreign Minister Miqdad to the Non-Aligned Countries Ministerial in Tehran: Israel seeks to obliterate the history of occupied Golan" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/5)

"Austrian Chancellor Gusenbauer calls for involving Syria in the Middle East peace conference. Mubarak, Blair, Italian FM D'Alima and Jordanian Monarch Abdullah prepare for the Bush conference" (Independent al-Watan, 9/5)

"Few hours after the pullout of British troops from al-Basra, and few days before the Petraeus-Crocker Report, Bush suddenly in Baghdad: Reducing US forces is feasible" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 9/4)

"Lebanese calls to investigate into the emergence Fateh al-Islam group and exposing perpetrators. Lebanese warnings against repercussions of rejecting the Parliament Speaker's initiative" (Government-owned Tishreen, 9/4)

"The Lebanese Army: Fateh al-Islam group is entirely connected to al-Qaeda organization" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 9/5)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Figures of Failure"

Ezz-Eddin Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/3): "The rising number of Iraqi and American deaths in the past few months show the failure of the American strategy in Iraq, contrary to the claims of American war theorists, who are trying to convince the world that progress is being made.... We do not expect the Petraeus-Crocker report in the middle of this month to be in favor of the US Administration.

"Iraq was plagued by the American invasion. It was fully destroyed as a result of this invasion. It lost more than one million of its

sons as direct victims. Four million Iraqis were displaced at home and abroad. Killing and destruction continues to be the main headline in Iraq more than four years into the occupation. So what more does the Bush Administration wants to end its occupation and leave the Iraqis determine their future...?

"What was not achieved in four years cannot be achieved in months. This means that an end to this tragedy begins with the removal of occupation and the launch of a genuine Iraqi political process to unify all Iraqi groups, consolidate the country's territorial integrity, and provide comprehensive security and stability. This is what the Bush Administration is supposed to acknowledge, today before tomorrow...."

"Hot Days"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/4): "The US campaign against Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is the beginning of the US Administration's attempt to find a way out of its Iraq predicament...."

"It is no secret to anyone that the American search for an exist appears futile at a time when the administration of President Bush is getting more confused, especially after the series of setbacks it suffered and the departure of most of the war hawks from the White House...."

"In light of this, the US nervousness is at its worst ever leading to further blunder and offhandedness in both decisions and practice.

"The world that faced the grave consequences of the US Administration's decisions when it was not under the pressure of time and embarrassment, now expects more disastrous decisions than those the repercussions of which it is experiencing today...."

"What A Fall Bush Expects!"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (9/4): "As fall begins, US President Bush and those who remain with him, hawks or doves, are in a hurry to score any victory to cover their defeats in Iraq...."

"Bush's call for a Middle East peace conference in Washington is part of this effort.... Preparations for the conference coincide with the start of the British withdrawal from Iraq, the announcement by the American ambassador in Iraq about the difficult position of his country there and the failure of the US policy and strategy in Iraq, the growing criticism of the Iraq war inside the United States, and attempts to blame the Al-Maliki government for the failure in Iraq...."

"So the Bush team is left only with the fall opportunity. Some believe it is the only option left for him, whether through fire or dialogue. Some fast-food meals would be enough to prepare the last supper to celebrate the lost peace to the tune of the withdrawing troops from Iraq, the fall of the lackeys and followers in Lebanon and the region, and the outcry of the free peoples of the region: Leave our countries, good riddance, and call it victory anyway you like!"

"Persistence in Mistake"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (9/4): "The US Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich heard from President Asad important words about US -Syrian relations and the possibility of advancing the peace process and maintaining security

and stability in the region....

"The US Congressman praised Syria's important role in the region and reiterated the need for dialogue with Damascus.... Similar arguments were made by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and many other American politicians who visited Syria, as well as by the Baker-Hamilton report.... Yet, the US Administration continues to look at the issues of the region with an Israeli eye and to insist on completing the Zionist-American plan that embroiled the United States in a unilateral policy that led to a clear failure unbefitting of the role and reputation of this superpower....

"The policy of the Bush administration, which is built on the principle of force, hegemony, and promotion of 'creative chaos, presented models of failures and tragedies and brought the hatred of peoples and the resentment of a large sector of the American officials who hope their country will play a constructive role in the whole world, unlike the ugly role it played in Iraq. They hope the United States will adopt neutral positions and respect the options of nations, not control them based on colonialist whims and tendencies and Israeli plans that violate Arab rights...."

Corbin